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ABSTRACT

A case study of one formal women's network was designed as an initial stage in examining the effectiveness and usefulness of overt, free-standing networks being established by career-oriented women. In all, 158 women contributed data concerning their current careers, interests and objectives in participating in the formal network, their networking activities outside of the formal network, and responses to the Personal Attributes Questionnaire, which measures androgynous, masculine, and feminine psychological characteristics. The results revealed that across all personality types, the primary reasons for participating in the network were to gain information and to meet other women. There was a slight impact of personality type on networking objectives. Lack of time and lack of information about how to participate in network activities were the problem areas cited most often, while no participants listed reappraisal on the job as a problem encountered in networking. When type of networking activity was examined, it was found that masculine psychological types indicated most frequently that they met with other women outside their organizations, though little networking outside organized meetings occurred across all types. Overall, the lack of participants' involvements in top-level management positions was seen to contribute to their high ranking of information seeking at the network meetings and their rather low ranking of providing information. (RL)

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INTER ORGANIZATIONAL NETWORKS: FORMAL COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS OF FEMALE ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERS

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INTER ORGANIZATIONAL NETWORKS: FORMAL COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS OF FEMALE ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERS

Recently, Jablin (1980) indicated that a preponderance of organizational communication research has ". . . explored either communication climates within organizations . . . or organizational communication networks (i.e., analysis of emergent communication patterns or structures through which information travels in the organizational setting)" (p. 1). The interest in network research has dramatically increased over the past several years. Farace, Monge, and Russell (1977) define network analysis as ". . . repetitive patterns of interaction among the members" (p. 180). This focus on networks has developed because of a realization that ". . . one's access to information about aspects of the organization is likely determined by his or her position in the network of information flow" (Albrecht, 1980, p. 2). Not only one's position in the network, but how one makes use of or helps to develop his/her own network, will have great impact on one's performance in the organization. It is because of the extensive impact such networking has, not only on the individual, but the organization as a whole, that communication networks are such important variables to study.

Research on communication networks has focused on the types of networks as they exist in the organizational setting, similar to those described by Katz and Kahn (1978) as: technical, supportive, maintenance, adaptive, and managerial. This previous research has attempted to describe the networks as they exist by asking or observing who organizational members talk with most and about what types of issues. Techniques used to analyze this phenomenon have included observing behavior, inspecting organizational records, having organizational members keep diaries, and the use of open-ended questionnaires (see, for example: Roberts & O'Reilly, 1978, and Goldhaber & Rogers, 1979).

Little research exists that attempts to describe how networks are used to support upward mobility in the organization or to provide support systems for organizational members. Additionally, an examination of the development of professional networks across different organizations, rather than within a single organization, might lead to a broader and more comprehensive interpretation of the concept of networking.

There is in the present network literature some suggestion of the application that might be made to external networks and how we might predict they would function. For example, previous network research suggests some questions of interest about liaisons. Liaisons have been identified as a specific type of network member within the organizational framework. They have been defined as ". . .a connector, a linker, a coordinator" (Farace, Monge, & Russell, 1977, p. 188) or what Likert calls a "linking pin" (1961). The key is the notion that the liaison is an individual who is able to maintain contact with various components of an organizational system. Thus, the characteristics of an individual who is able to provide such "links" internally for the organization would probably be the same traits exhibited by an effective user and creator of a network external to the organization. Some of the conclusions about liaisons should apply to the external "linkers". For example, liaisons have higher formal status in the organization than do nonliaisons and liaisons have been organizational members for longer periods of time than nonliaisons. Additionally, one might expect that liaisons within the organization and effective networkers across organizations would exhibit assertive behavior in initiating contacts with others and that they would be able to adapt their communicative to fit the demands of the situation. Thus, psychological gender of such individuals would be of interest as well. The concept of androgynous individuals has received wide attention in recent research. According to Bem (1974),

androgynous individuals are those who have incorporated both masculine and feminine personality traits into a positive self-image and that these traits are exhibitied regardless of the biological sex of the individual. Spence and Helmreich (1974) have developed an instrument used to measure androgynous characteristics of individuals. This instrument, the Personal Attribute Questionnaire (PAQ), was used in the present research to identify androgynous, as well as high masculine and high feminine individuals, who were actively involved in networking.

It is the intent of this research project to examine professional networking as it applies to inter-organizational networks as opposed to intra-organizational networks, which are used for the purpose of individual professional advancement. Because female organizational members have often had difficulty making use of informal and formal networks within as well as external to their organization, inter-organizational networks have developed by and for female organizational members. Thus, the study examines the similarities between conclusions we can draw from previous network research on intra-organizational communication, to women's external networking activities. One particular women's network was studied in detail.

Two characteristics seem to distinguish internal networks from external networks. First, internal networks are made up only of organizational members from the same organization while external networks cut across organizations and tend to link individuals at the same level in a variety of organizations. Secondly, the end product for the internal network is to develop an effective system of operating within that organizational framework while the end product for the external network is the professional development of the individual regardless of organizational membership. Male organizational members have used informal networks for some time to help promote themselves professionally.

These activities have somtimes been referred to as the "Old Boys' Network". As more women reach middle and top level management positions in organizations they have found such useful contacts unavailable to them and have begun to establish their own networks in response to their need for links with others who can help them professionally. One characteristic that seems to distinguish between male and female external networks is the outcome of the network. The "Old Boys' Network" often had professional development as a by-product while initially the network seemed to exist for other purposes (i.e., special service projects like Kiwanis). The female networks are often established for the specific purpose of making professional contacts with no other goal or outcome in mind. Recently, a number of writers have addressed the issue of the new female networking activities and have suggested potential areas of interest to explore.

Women's Networking

Mary Scott Welch provides an excellent review of theconcept of networking as a strategy for career development. Networking is "the process of developing and using your contacts for information, advice and moral support as you pursue your career" (Welch, 1980, p. 15). It is well-noted in networking literature that men have been networking informally for years in order to promote themselves or their proteges. Their networking occurs more often as a by-product of membership in social clubs, civic organization, and participation in athletic events (Hart, 1980; Henry, 1980; Kleiman, 1980; and Welch, 1980).

Women on the other hand are establishing different methods for facilitating contacts. They have formalized this informal activity by establishing overt free-standing networks. It is a deliberate strategy of linking women with other women in an attempt to expand contacts. The major objectives are to provide women with opportunities to make contacts, provide

successful role models for each other, generate solutions to problems and disseminate information.

Kleiman (1980) has developed a historical review of this networking movement. In her research she designates the networks she has studied into eight categories. Business networks most often cut across a wide variety of organizations and management levels. These networks tend to be more diverse in their membership. Other networks have developed out of common interests, goals or professions. These netwoks are more exclusive and focus on special interests, such as health, sports, art, politics, and professions. Support networks, formed to help members cope with physical, emotional or mental problems, tend to be one-issue centered. She also notes that there are many informal networks that have and will continue to evolve as women increase their contacts and become more aware of each other's needs.

Because so many types of networks exist and the movement is so new, it is difficult to conduct rigorous empirical research on such a fluid activity. Therefore, a case study of one formal network was designed as an initial stage in examining the effectiveness and usefulness of overt free-standing networks being established by career-oriented women.

A Case Study

In a large mid-western city, a formal women's network was established by four local professionals. The first meeting which drew seventy participants was held in October 1979. The structure of each meeting includes informal networking and an educational program. Contrary to some networks which limit membership to certain management levels or careers, this network is open to all women. Consequently it is a diverse group. No formal dues are charged but revenue is generated from an admissions fee charged at each meeting. A mailing list comprised of women who have attended network meetings and those

who want to be kept informed now exceeds 500.

A 29 item survey was designed to gather descriptive information on the network participants. The survey asked for information on their current careers, interests and objectives in participating in the formal network and their networking activities outside of the formal network. The Personal Attributes Questionnaire which measures an individual's level of androgynous characteristics was also included. In September, 1980 the survey was mailed to women whose names were on the mailing list as of August, 1980. Within three weeks, 158 (32%) surveys were returned.

Demographic and Career Information

Most respondents (31%) were between 30 and 35 years old; 21% were between 36 and 40; and 20% were between 41 and 50. There was a low percentage (17%) of young professional women between 18 and 20 years old.

Seventy-nine percent have college degrees; 42% having graduate (M.B.A., M.A., or Ph.D.) degrees. The respondents work mostly in educational (17%) or social service organizations (12%). A substantial proportion are self-employed (12%). Twenty-three percent have positions with no supervisory responsibilities while 22% are supervisors, 18% are middle managers, and 15% hold executive level positions.

The respondents seem to be less mobile than most career women as 46% have lived in the area for more than 11 years as compared to 30% who report being in the area for five years or less. Four percent of the group are relatively new to the area. Those who reported moving to the city because of relocation indicated that slightly more did so for their own employment or school opportunities (39%) than for their spouse's opportunities (32%).

Results

Three major results from the survey of the Women's Network are of interest. First, the objectives of the women who are participating in the network gives some indication of motivations and goals of external liaisons. Across all of the personality types the primary reason for participating in the network is to gain information (androgynous $\bar{X}$=2.5; masculine $\bar{X}$=2.5; feminine $\bar{X}$=2.2; undifferentiated $\bar{X}$=2.5; overall $\bar{X}$=2.4). The second most frequent reason for attending and participating in the external network was to "meet other women" (androgynous $\bar{X}$=3.0; masculine $\bar{X}$=2.6; feminine $\bar{X}$=2.6; undifferentiated $\bar{X}$=2.6; overall $\bar{X}$=2.7).

Least important across all groups was to recruit candidates for job opportunities (androgynous $\bar{X}$=6.3; masculine $\bar{X}$=6.2; feminine $\bar{X}$=5.8; undifferentiated $\bar{X}$=6.3; overall $\bar{X}$=6.2). Differences between subgroups indicate some impact of personality type on their networking objectives.

Insert Table 1 about here

The second result of interest is the network problems encountered by participants. Across all subgroups the lack of time was listed as the most difficult problem to resolve (androgynous = 33%; masculine = 27%; feminine = 28%; undifferentiated = 17%; overall = 27%). Second most frequently listed problem was a lack of information about how to participate in network activities (androgynous = none; masculine = 12%; feminine = 12%; undifferentiated = none; overall = 6%). No participants listed repraisal on the job as a problem encountered in networking.

The final result of most interest is the type of networking activity engaged in by participants. First, masculine psychological types indicated more frequently than any other group that they did meet with women outside their organization for the purpose of networking followed by androgynous individuals. However, androgynous types who do make such contacts appear

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Insert Table 2 about here

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to do so more frequently on a weekly basis than other types. An examination of Table 3 indicates that across the entire group a minimum amount of networking in being conducted outside the organized meetings (androgynous = 37%; masculine = 35%; feminine = 24%; undifferentiated = 13%; overall = 28%).

Insert Table 3 about here

An examination of Table 4 indicates the frequency of channels used for communicating information and establishing networks. It suggests a more informal method of contact is being used. The phone was most frequently used across all subgroups with face-to-face contact listed second. Memos are infrequently used as are third party contacts.

Insert Table 4 about here

The location of such contacts to establish networks seems to occur most frequently at lunch or dinner meetings and no significant differences of interest were found among the subgroups.

Insert Table 5 about here

Finally, the type of individuals with whom these external liaisons make contact provide insight into the way in which individuals begin to build networks. Friends and internal business associates were most frequently listed as contacts. Respondents make contact least often with new acquaintances from the formal network.

Insert Table 6 about here

Conclusions

Overall, the majority of women in this particular network are in middle to low level management positions. According to Kleiman (1980) this network may not be as useful to middle and upper management professionals. Since there are so few women who represent executive management, participants have minimal opportunities to find career links and role models. The lack of participants in top level management positions contributes to the high ranking of seeking information ($\bar{X}$=1.9) at the network meetings and the rather low ranking of giving or providing information ($\bar{X}$=3.7) as participant objectives for involvement.

Thirty-two percent of the total respondents had not attended any network meetings. Initially it was felt that network participants would be more actively involved in networking with women outside their organizations thus, the rest of the analysis was completed on this subgroup (n=102). However, 80% of the nonparticipants did indicate that they meet with women outside of their organizations.

It was surprising to discover that these women, who were supporting the formal development of a network, were not making more use of their network contacts outside of the organized meetings. Additionally, these women are using friends and internal business associates as their primary contacts rather than initiating new links with less familiar individuals. Apparently, they have not yet learned how to translate networking skills to everyday communication patterns.

The impact of androgyny traits on this group of individuals provided some interesting insights into the communication behaviors of the group. Androgynous individuals gave more information than any other group while masculine individuals wanted less career guidance than the other groups. Masculine individuals were more interested in making business contacts. This seems consistent with the traditional sex role differences as the feminine group was least interested in making business contacts. Additionally, androgynous and masculine sex types were much more likely to meet with external professionals than any of the other groups. Consequently, the masculine group does not appear to be as dependent on their internal resources as the other personality types.

The unique characteristics of this network (i.e., the large level of middle to low level management) will, of course, limit any conclusions. In order to establish a more comprehensive view of women's networking activities and

characteristics, a larger data bank needs to be collected from a more representative cross section of female organizational members. As such networking activities continue to increase in size and impact on the organization, as well as th individual, this communication behavior will be an important extrinsic organizational variable to examine.

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TABLE 1

RANKING OF OBJECTIVES FOR ATTENDING NETWORK MEETINGS

	Androgynous $\bar{X}$	Masculine $\bar{X}$	Feminine $\bar{X}$	Undifferentiated $\bar{X}$	Overall $\bar{X}$
JOB OPPORTUNITIES	4.7	4.9	4.8	5.2	4.9
PROMOTE BUSINESS/ MYSELF	4.8	4.2	5.0	4.8	4.7
RECEIVE INFORMATION	2.5	2.5	2.2	2.5	2.4
GIVE INFORMATION	4.5	4.6	4.9	5.4	4.9
RECRUIT WOMEN FOR JOBS	6.3	6.2	5.9	6.3	6.2
MEET WOMEN	3.0	2.6	2.6	2.6	2.7
ATTEND EDUC. PROGRAMS	4.0	4.1	3.1	3.5	3.7
CAREER GUIDANCE	3.9	4.3	3.3	3.0	3.6

TABLE 2

PERCENTAGE OF PARTICIPANTS MEETING
WITH WOMEN OUTSIDE
THE INTERNAL ORGANIZATION

	Androgynous X	Masculine X	Feminine X	Undifferentiated X	Overall X
Do meet with women	78%	81%	64%	66%	72%
Do not meet with women	18%	19%	36%	29%	25%
No response	4%	-	-	5%	3%

TABLE 3

PERCENTAGE OF PARTICIPANT'S FREQUENCY
IN MEETING WITH WOMEN OUTSIDE
THE INTERNAL ORGANIZATION

	Androgynous X	Masculine X	Feminine X	Undifferentiated X	Overall X
Less than once a week	30%	38%	40%	30%	34%
Once a week	37%	35%	24%	13%	28%
2-3 times a week	15%	4%	-	17%	9%
More than 3 times a week	-	-	-	-	-
Do not meet with women outside my organization	19%	23%	36%	42%	30%

TABLE 4

FREQUENCY OF CHANNEL USAGE IN MAKING CONTACTS

	Androgynous X	Masculine X	Feminine X	Undifferentiated X	Overall X
Memos	3	3	-	1	7
3rd Party Contact	4	4	-	1	9
Wait for other to initiate	3	1	1	1	6
Phone	20	17	13	12	62
Face to face	13	12	11	9	45

TABLE 5

RANKINGS OF MEETING LOCATIONS

	Androgynous X	Masculine X	Feminine X	Undifferentiated X	Overall X
Lunch	1.0	1.2	1.6	1.0	1.2
Dinner	1.9	2.0	2.1	1.3	1.8
Sports/Athletic Events	2.8	2.9	3.1	2.7	2.9
Cocktails after Work	2.8	2.2	2.3	1.6	2.2
Cultural Events	2.6	2.3	2.2	2.2	2.3
Organizational Meetings	2.8	2.0	1.5	1.6	1.8

TABLE 6

RANKING OF WHO PARTICIPANTS MEET WITH MOST OFTEN

	Androgynous $\bar{X}$	Masculine $\bar{X}$	Feminine $\bar{X}$	Undifferentiated $\bar{X}$	Overall $\bar{X}$
Friends	1.9	1.4	1.5	1.0	1.5
Internal Organization Contacts	1.9	2.2	1.6	1.6	1.8
Professional Contacts	2.4	1.7	2.0	1.7	1.9
New Contacts from Network	3.5	3.3	3.5	2.3	3.1
Family	3.3	3.3	2.9	2.2	3.0
External Organization Contacts	3.4	2.2	2.2	1.7	2.4
New Clients/ Business Contacts	3.9	2.8	2.6	2.2	2.9